

P 030422Z NOV 05
FM AMEMBASSY TASHKENT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4530
INFO AMEMBASSY BISHKEK
AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE
AMEMBASSY ALMATY
AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY KIEV
AMEMBASSY BEIJING

C O N F I D E N T I A L TASHKENT 003019

DEPT FOR EUR/CACEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/2/15
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [PINR](#) [UZ](#)
SUBJECT: GULNORA KARIMOVA PROVIDES GRANTS IN HOPE OF
IMPROVING IMAGE

CLASSIFIED BY AMB. JON R. PURNELL, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D).

REFS: A) TASHKENT 2892 B) TASHKENT 2473 C) TASHKENT 2376 D)
TASHKENT 2378

¶1. (C) Summary: Eager to improve her less than stellar image, First Daughter Gulnora Karimova is pursuing an intensive grant disbursement program with both domestic and international dimensions. She is using three associations to provide grants: FundForum.Uz promotes Uzbek foreign cultural relations, Mehr Nuri focuses on internal social issues, and the Women's Council on women's and children's issues. Karimova has reportedly traveled to all of Uzbekistan's fourteen oblasts over the past few months to personally present assistance to the needy. Despite her new philanthropic side, the Uzbek public's opinion of Karimova does not seem to have changed; she remains universally disliked. End summary.

GULNORA CRISS-CROSSES UZBEKISTAN

¶2. (C) First Daughter Gulnora Karimova, who is keen to improve her image as well as that of her family (ref B), has established a network of three umbrella grant-making institutions to disburse a wide range of social, cultural, and educational programs. FundForum.Uz ("The Uzbekistan Cultural and Artistic Fund") aims to develop Uzbek cultural relations with foreign countries. Mehr Nuri ("Light of Kindness") focuses on domestic social issues. "We Are Near: Your Women's Council" works on women's and children's issues. A letter personally signed by Karimova states that the three organizations meet civil society standards, and are ready to cooperate with everyone "who shares our views." A well-respected woman's activist, whose organization has regional branches throughout the country, told poloff that Karimova visited all fourteen oblasts over the past three months to provide grants to NGOs. On October 14, Gulnora also met with women's NGOs in Tashkent (ref A).

FUNDFORUM.UZ SUPPORTS CLOSER UZBEK-RUSSIAN TIES

¶3. (C) FundForum.Uz was established in February 2004 with the aim of developing Uzbek cultural relations with the international community. The Fund's documents state that it aims to improve Uzbekistan's cultural relations with Russia, China, Egypt, Japan and "several European countries." But while FundForum.Uz professes to be a "bridge between nations," its past activities appear almost exclusively aimed at strengthening Uzbek-Russian cultural cooperation. FundForum.Uz has sponsored Russian art exhibits, opera singers, and pop music festivals in Tashkent (including concerts by leading singers Katya Lel, Maksim Galkin, and the "Loobe" band). It has also sponsored numerous Uzbek cultural events in Russia, including art and photo exhibits, book fairs, opera, youth and puppet theatres, a Novruz

celebration, a Russia-Uzbekistan soccer match, and the World Gym Championships.

¶4. (C) FundForum.Uz's Leadership Council includes Russian National TV Station Association President Eduard Sagalaev, Russian Federation actor Leonid Bronevoy, cosmonaut Vladimir Janibekov, archeologist Boris Stavinsky, opera singer Elena Obratsova, historian Gregory Semenov and Russian actress Vera Alentova. The Fund has representative offices in both Moscow and Beijing.

¶5. (C) According to an informed source, FundForum.Uz's initial endowment was 500 million soum (\$434,000). From November until January 2006, FundForum.Uz will fund seven projects totaling 16.9 million soum (\$14,700) in Margilan (women and children), Kokand (handicapped children), Navoi (talented youth), Samarkand (children's artistic development; librarian association), and Bukhara (art center; photography center).

"MEHR NURI" FOCUSED ON INTERNAL SOCIAL ISSUES

¶6. (C) Mehr Nuri works on internal social issues, targeting poor children, students, women, pensioners, mahallas, schools, hospitals and religious institutions. Mehr Nuri's guiding motto is "Show Kindness Every Day." Mehr Nuri provides monthly allowances to hundreds of needy families via charitable bank accounts. In 2005 Mehr Nuri provided grants to over two-dozen students covering a year of higher education. It also provided desks and supplies for schools. Mehr Nuri has given gifts and provided meals for mahalla (neighborhood) associations. In Namangan, the organization invited hundreds of pensioners to a meal. Mehr Nuri also provided equipment to orphanages and maternity hospitals, as well as furniture and computers to madrassas and religious institutions in Andijon, Bukhara, Karshi, and Tashkent. Following October 28 Friday prayers at Tashkent's main mosque, the head imam announced that Mehr Nuri was sponsoring Iftar dinners in Samarkand, Bukhara, and Namangan.

¶7. (C) Over the next six months Mehr Nuri is expected to fund five projects costing 34.6 million soum (\$30,000) in Fergana City (women and children), Samarkand (assistance to handicapped; businesswoman association), Bukhara (businesswomen association), and Kokand (women's legal protection).

WOMEN'S COUNCIL SUPPORTS WOMEN, CHILDREN, AND FAMILIES

¶8. (C) "We are Near: Your Women's Council" focuses on improving the health of mothers, children, and families. It held its first public event in February 2005, and organized its first gathering of Women's Councils in March. The Council organizes regular Friday meetings on women's issues, and has distributed children's gifts. A woman's activist familiar with the First Daughter's activities told poloff that Karimova has been providing grants of 5 million soum to Women's Committees around the country. These committees have in turn organized many of Gulnora's meetings with NGOs.

¶9. (C) From November-December the Women's Council will fund five projects worth 27.2 million soum (\$23,650) in Kokand (women's reproductive health), Bukhara (women's crisis center), Samarkand (AIDS awareness; women and children), and Tashkent (television programs on charitable giving and the role of modern women).

IS IT ENOUGH?

¶10. (C) Comment: Karimova, whose grant-making activities are undoubtedly aimed at improving her public image, still has a long way to go. The general perception remains that she prefers to live abroad, and it is a fact that she can barely speak the national language. She is also perceived as

having an unquenchable thirst for money and power, with
business holdings that cover a wide sector of the economy
(refs C and D).

PURNELL